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ABSTRACT

Participation in a Title III consortium grant has brought about many changes at Cochise College in Arizona, and has helped create an institutional culture that embraces change and supports faculty and staff efforts to improve the institution. In December, 1993, a Planning Task Force (PTF) was established, composed of 23 members, about one-half of whom were faculty members. The PTF's initial efforts were spent in reviewing a pilot budgeting process, giving members a greater appreciation for the task of establishing college priorities and allocating resources. The PTF meetings have served as staff development opportunities, as members have applied their experiences in the PTF to other areas of their jobs. In addition to the PTF, other faculty have been involved in Assessment Focus committees, formed to link institutional goals with intended outcomes, effectiveness standards, and key indicators. The General Education, Direct Employment, and Developmental Education focus committees, for example, have drafted statements of purpose and begun to link developmental education learning outcomes to preparing students for college-level coursework. Other Title III efforts include the pilot testing of the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire to measure student quality of effort and gain as well as satisfaction and an ad-hoc Student Tracking committee collecting information on student intent and goals. Through these efforts, the college plans to meet its goal of integrating assessment, planning, and budgeting by the 1996-97 academic year. (KP)

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by

Karen Nicodemus

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Presentation to American Association of Community Colleges
April 6, 1994

"Collaborative Learning Strategies for the 90s in the Development of Institutional Effectiveness"

Cochise College continues to benefit from its participation in the Title III consortium grant. We are at one time very similar to, and yet very different from, the other participating colleges. To add to Dr. Klein's earlier comments, our Colleges have shared information and ideas on planning, assessment models and instruments, computing environments, student tracking and advising systems, accreditation activities and, in general, how our Colleges operate. The College has also made use of ideas and information provided by Title III consultants-evaluators, including Dr. Melanie Tang of Western Research and Development and Dr. Marchelle Fox of San Diego City College. Our College has been able to use this shared information to move aggressively forward in its own assessment and planning efforts.

Cochise College over the past 12 months has seen a number of changes. Perhaps the greatest success has been the development of a culture that embraces change. Dr. Walter S. Patton, whom I represent today, was installed as Cochise College's president in July 1993. Dr. Patton had formerly served as our Vice President of Student Services. By the end of this current year, we will have seen the appointment of three new vice-presidents --Instruction, Administrative Services, and Student Services. We will, in April, break ground on a major expansion project on our Sierra Vista campus--in mid-April we begin migrating to our new institutional computing environment. Our President, in his inaugural address, challenged faculty to "teach their students not only the objective content of their disciplines but a larger love of learning."

Support staff and administrators will be expected to do everything in their power to help create the kind of environment we need to make not only learning, but love of learning possible.

It has, to say the least, been an exciting time at our institution. Faculty and staff are now seeking answers to how we might better serve our students. There is a climate of inquiry that supports change and that is not defensive about finding ways to do things better--faculty and staff do not feel threatened by asking, or being asked, questions. As a College we are willing to admit that we can do things better, and most important that we are committed to doing things better. Questions, not by administrators, but by faculty and staff are being asked of why we are doing things: questions related to quality of instruction; questions related to the appropriateness of expenditures (what are essentials to the quality of instruction and what are "want to haves"); and questions related to what do our students think about our College. Now these may all seem like logical questions that should be raised on a regular basis and in the past have been raised by College administrators--but what pleases us is that over the past year these are not questions being posed by administrators but, as I said, by faculty and staff willing to examine (critically) how we have been doing business and how to improve on what we have been doing.

Let me provide some examples of what has been happening at Cochise College. Since December, we have had an active, broad-based Planning Task Force. This is a group of 23, of which approximately 50% have faculty status. When invited to serve by the President (as volunteers) Planning Task Force members were challenged to bring their knowledge and expertise to the group but

to leave behind any agenda or need to represent a specific group. Members were challenged to adopt and practice a "planning-oriented behavior". Members were selected for their ability to think critically and for their willingness to be outspoken, yet empathetic to other points of view. PTF members were also challenged to be ambassadors of the College's planning process and the President's commitment to integrating assessment, planning, and budgeting.

In the past, when decisions with short- and long-range implications for the College were made by the administration and then questioned by faculty and staff, the pat response of senior-level administrators was that faculty and staff were unable to see the "big picture". And as a former faculty member, I can say that the administration was not always wrong in saying so--faculty can sometimes be myopic in their view of College business. What we have tried to cultivate over the past year and through the PTF and other planning committees, is the ability not only to see the big picture but to help us paint how Cochise College will look in the future.

The PTF's initial efforts were spent in reviewing a pilot budgeting process that the President had initiated in July. In their review of these budgets, PTF members were challenged to think as Chief Executive Officers--most were initially uncomfortable discussing issues as CEOs, especially the discussion of budget line items that called for a decision or recommendation. Most members were hesitant and tried all sorts of tactics to avoid making recommendations on a peer's budget request--especially when PTF recommendations for less than the original amount requested. As a result of our budget reviews, PTF members identified a number of

concerns and drafted recommendations for the President's Office on the budgeting process. What was clear to all PTF members is that budgeting cannot occur in isolation of College or department long- and short-range plans. Currently the entire budgeting process is being overhauled to facilitate the integration of planning and budgeting. PTF members also have a greater appreciation for the task of establishing College priorities and allocating resources, and something of what it feels like to sit in the President's chair.

In the budget review process, PTF members focused not only on line item expenditures but also raised questions on program outcomes and anticipated effects on students, the community, and College at large. Questions raised regarding a budget request for portfolio assessment led to a larger discussion of the College's efforts in identifying learning outcomes and assessment. Any components that the PTF felt are central to program reviews will be folded into the program review process, which will be revised during the upcoming year.

But even as PTF members assume a CEO perspective, plans are under way to continue the training of "seeing and painting the big picture". As educators, we are always seeking ways to involve our students in their education, not only in the classroom but by participation in helping the institution define itself. Yet at the community college this is often a difficult task. Many of our students are balancing job and family responsibilities; many follow a pattern of stopping out and dropping back in. It is very difficult to find students who have the time to be active members of College committees for a long enough period of time in which to become familiar with the issues. We have decided that next year,

as we again review College plans and budgets, PTF members will be challenged to assume a student perspective--what benefits would the student perceive; what are the students' expectations of the College. It should be interesting to contrast a CEO perception with the student perception? How similar or dissimilar will be recommendations derived from a student perspective as compared to a CEO perspective?

Not only have members gained from thinking like a CEO, but Planning Task Force members have also gained an institutional perspective from the exchange of information between College units. Academic personnel have a broader understanding of student services and administrative services and vice versa. An exercise as simple as reviewing the Art Department's minimal request for travel monies for a field trip to Mexico (minimal because of Cochise's location to Mexico) led to a discussion by the academic side of the house of the merits of such a field trip balanced by the concerns raised by student services for the need of an institutional policy, consistently applied, on student travel to a concern expressed by the administrative services on vehicle insurance and the wear and tear on College vehicles driven on the back roads of Mexico (as well as Arizona).

The Planning Task Force meetings, as well as related campus planning committee meetings have served as staff development opportunities. The process has been as valuable as the product itself. Individuals are asking tough questions, exploring and investigating--recognizing that the College must develop an information system that allows us to make informed decisions and not simply guesses about yesterday, today, or tomorrow. A planning meeting two weeks ago generated a list of reports and data that the

committee feels must be integrated into the planning and College's information system for us to make wise decisions about our future. This, for Cochise College, has been a step forward in how we do business. Because of the stability of our faculty and staff--they tend to stay on board for a long period of time--in meetings you often hear people making decisions based on anecdotal stories or their intuition (derived from years of experience). Those may be relative and important pieces of information but we now have faculty and staff demanding more quantitative data. For each report generated last year as part of Title III there were requests for additional information and reports.

Faculty and staff who have been involved in the planning process have taken their new perspective and used it in different ways. A PTF member, who also sits on the College Senate, found himself examining proposed curriculum in greater detail--asking many of the same questions the PTF had asked in its review of budgets and discussion of programs and curriculum. Another member now finds herself not just reading newspapers and magazines but collecting what she feels is important information to bring back to the PTF--for example, proposed changes in Arizona's high school graduation competencies are now seen as an item to be discussed when looking at curriculum developments. After a half-day meeting to discuss the College Scenario, several PTF members (on their own) organized a meeting of interested faculty and staff to discuss how the College currently sees itself and what faculty and staff value about our College--a member of this subgroup informally surveyed his current students for their perceptions of the College. All this was done by faculty and staff initiative and in preparation for the PTF's all-day retreat on the College Scenario and long-

range goals, held last Friday.

In addition to the work of the planning committees, other faculty have been deeply involved in moving the College forward in the assessment of student achievement. What is referred to as Assessment Focus committees, based on the College Mission Statement, were formed to link goals with intended outcomes and effectiveness standards and key indicators. Although the College had already initiated efforts in linking goals to outcomes, the College benefitted in Spring, 1993 from a Title III workshop, held at Central Arizona, that featured Dr. Harriett Calhoun of Jefferson Community College. This past year, the General Education, Direct Employment, and Developmental Education focus committees have all worked hard at drafting statements of purpose. From these statements, goals will be identified and linked to intended outcomes, effectiveness standards and key indicators. The College's degree programs will be reviewed in the context of the General Education statement, and where appropriate the Direct Employment (or Vocational Education) statement. Already, there has been cross dialogue between the General Education and Developmental Education committees to link developmental education learning outcomes to preparing students for college-level coursework. The assessment focus committees have also identified other assessment measures. The College has through Title III pilot tested the Community College Student Experiences Questionnaire, which measures student quality of effort and gain as well as satisfaction. The College will use the CCSEQ in 1994-95 as one measure of institutional effectiveness, on a number of dimensions. Through Title III objectives, graduate surveys were distributed and analyzed; reports on transfer students, the success of

developmental students in course sequences were prepared and disseminated. Under Title III, evaluation measures were implemented to assess the effectiveness of student intervention strategies, including a Success for Alert and Single Parent program.

An ad hoc Student Tracking committee, in its review of collecting information on student intent and goal broadened into a discussion of College degree programs. Last week these concerns where shared, by members of the ad hoc committee, with the Joint Instructional Council. As one member of the committee stated, "each rock we turn over leads to another"--but, again, what pleases us is that this willingness to turn over rocks is not directed by the administration or outside agency but the result of the College's own growth activities.

Cochise College, at the end of this year, will have clearly sent the message that we are changing. Our President has given our faculty and staff multiple opportunities to help determine how that change is defined. Our planning efforts will have produced a College Scenario, with long-range goals and planning priorities for 1995-96. Resource requests for 1995-96 will be submitted with action plans that are in support of College priorities. Our assessment efforts will have provided the framework for the implementation of overall program and curriculum review and revision over the next two years. Additionally, as a College we will have identified indicators of institutional effectiveness that will be folded into our planning process. Although it is a never-ending process, we are running towards our goal of having truly integrated assessment, planning, and budgeting by the 1996-97 academic year.